UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FORTY-SIXTH SESSION

Official Records

SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE
7th meeting
held on
Wednesday, 23 October 1991
at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 7th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. PIBULSONGGRAM (Thailand)

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AGENDA ITEM 75: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION

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25 October 1991

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 75: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (A/46/21, 336, 449)

1. Mrs. SEVIGNY (Under-Secretary-General for Public Information) said that events over the past year had propelled the United Nations to the forefront of the international scene and spurred a revival of public and media interest. Her Department had spared no effort to meet the increased demand for information, particularly on the role of the Organization and on actions taken by the Security Council and the Secretary-General. DPI was the focal point within the United Nations for information on the latest developments; as such it made available to the press topical and background documents, updates and summaries of coming documents, and had organized press conferences. It had given national and international coverage to the Secretary-General's diplomacy on the hostage question, El Salvador, Cyprus, Afghanistan, the emergency in the Horn of Africa, and the United Nations operation in Western Sahara. DPI staff had also acted as press spokesmen for many United Nations missions in the field.

2. The Department had continued to survey public opinion and awareness in Member States about the United Nations. Thus far, with the release of 29 public opinion surveys since 1989, about one quarter of the world's population had been covered. The polls had provided very useful data on priority issues of interest to the public as well as on sources of information about the Organization and its agencies, enabling DPI to monitor the trends and adjust its activities accordingly. The polls had consistently shown that most people had little specific knowledge about the agencies and programmes of the United Nations system, and that the issues of major concern were the environment, peace and security, human rights, drug abuse, disarmament, children's issues and global food programmes. Thus, besides explaining how the United Nations system was constituted, the Department's major task would be to explain to the public how the Organization's work was related to the issues that concerned them and how it was relevant to their lives. That called for new strategies, an example of which was the award by DPI of certificates of recognition to any pro bono campaigns by members of the International Advertising Association or the International Public Relations Association that supported the programmes and goals of the United Nations.

3. The Department had continued to produce factual media profiles of Member States, which gave a good picture of the various countries and would be included in the second, expanded edition of the World Media Handbook to be published early in 1992.

4. The Department was still striving to stimulate public interest in the United Nations in order to attract more support for its objectives. Several media round tables had been organized both at Headquarters and in the field, bringing senior media representatives from different regions of the world together with top United Nations officials to discuss topics including

(Mrs. Sevigny)

disarmament, human rights and the question of Palestine. DPI had organized briefing programmes for nearly 700 public groups and had arranged for Secretariat officials to speak on issues of interest to the United Nations to many audiences in North America and in different parts of the world. As part of the outreach to media professionals, the Department's 1991 training programme for broadcasters and journalists had since September been briefing and giving in-service training to 14 participants from developing countries.

5. As a follow-up to the thorough review by the Committee on Information of the Yearbook of the United Nations, the Department had arranged for the publication of three backlog editions of the Yearbook, those of 1988, 1989 and 1990. The 1987 Yearbook would be ready for publication by the end of the year, and work had already begun on the 1991 edition, to be completed in late 1992. All editions would be produced in accordance with the new guidelines set after the review, and it was expected that those changes would restore the regular and timely production of the Yearbook, while maintaining its usual high standards as a reference book on the work of the Organization.

6. Using a variety of media tailored to different audiences, the Department had sought to draw global public attention to and support for priority issues such as peace-keeping, disarmament, decolonization, human rights, the struggle against apartheid, and economic and social development.

7. On the subject of peace-making and peace-keeping, in which interest was higher than ever, the Department had produced television news items that were regularly broadcast, for example on the Cable News Network "World Report", as well as press kits and other information on ongoing United Nations peace-keeping operations. In March, the Department had co-sponsored a symposium held in Singapore on the changing role of the United Nations in conflict resolution and peace-keeping, in cooperation with the Institute of Policy Studies of Singapore and the Government of Japan.

8. The Department had also organized several non-governmental-organization (NGO) briefings on issues relating to disarmament and to international peace and security. The theme of the annual NGO Conference sponsored by DPI in September and attended by some 1,200 representatives from 60 Member States, had been peace, justice and development as ingredients for an emerging world order.

9. As coordinator of the public information activities of the World Public Information Campaign on Human Rights, the Department had proposed to the Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC) the establishment of an inter-agency working group on human rights. An ad hoc working group had been set up to prepare for the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights and for the observance of 1993 as the International Year for the World's Indigenous People.

(Mrs. Sevigny)

10. The Department had also worked with the secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and with other United Nations agencies on preparations for the Conference, to be held in June 1992 in Brazil. All the United Nations information centres were working to increase local awareness of sustainable development, using a variety of print, radio and television items produced by the Department in official languages.

11. The Department was also producing regular television coverage of events at Headquarters and, as perhaps the most efficient method of publicizing the United Nations message, it sent daily video highlights of the United Nations coverage to the international television syndicators, Visnews and Worldwide Television News, which in turn distributed the material in their daily satellite newsfeeds to over 1,000 television stations in nearly 100 countries.

12. In a number of publications and broadcasts, the Department continued to cover economic and social development issues, including natural disaster reduction, international efforts to combat illicit drugs, the aftermath of Chernobyl, and the external debt problem.

13. The Department had continued to call attention to the issue of African recovery and development. Its journal, Africa Recovery, targeted at foreign policy-makers, the media and NGOs, was widely recognized as a major publication in that area. Together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Department had organized a tour of Togo and the United Republic of Tanzania for 31 senior journalists from prominent world newspapers to allow them to experience first-hand some of the economic and social challenges confronting African countries.

14. As part of the new approach to information and communications questions pursuant to General Assembly resolution 45/76, DPI and the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in cooperation with UNDP and several national agencies for international development, had in the spring of 1991 organized a seminar in Namibia on the promotion of an independent and pluralistic press in Africa, with participants from 38 African countries. The Department had just published and circulated worldwide the final document of the seminar, the Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press, and was in the process of estimating the financial implications of the projects proposed therein. The Department, working closely with UNESCO, was now considering similar seminars for media professionals - including experts in marketing, distribution and banking - from Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America. Such seminars could help forge the democratic culture and the entrepreneurial spirit that were essential for both development and democracy. Indeed, a free, pluralistic and independent press was the sine qua non of any democratization process, and democracy and economic development went hand in hand.

(Mrs. Sevigny)

15. The struggle against apartheid remained a major concern. The travelling photo exhibit organized jointly with the Centre against Apartheid was constantly being updated to reflect the rapidly changing situation in South Africa, and the Department had continued to produce anti-apartheid radio programmes for broadcast to South Africa from neighbouring States.

16. The Department had also maintained its multi-media programme on the question of Palestine: national journalists' encounters had been held in Belgium and Germany, and a regional encounter for European journalists had been held in Finland.

17. The network of 67 United Nations information centres had continued to promote public interest in and understanding of the goals and activities of the Organization, through extensive contacts with the press, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations and other bodies in the countries concerned. In close collaboration particularly with UNDP, DPI was seeking to project a consistent image of the United Nations. In recent months, it had, inter alia, organized two regional meetings of directors of information centres in Africa and in Europe, and a regional meeting in Latin America focusing on reference service training at the information centres. In order to ensure more rapid distribution of information to the information centres, DPI was giving special attention to introducing new electronic techniques and equipment, and training staff to use them. By the end of the year, some 30 centres would be linked to Headquarters by electronic mail. In compliance with General Assembly resolution 45/76, DPI had taken steps to establish an information centre in Namibia; it was also discussing the budgetary implications of opening centres in Poland and Yemen, and preparing estimates of funds needed for operations in other existing centres. All the information centres were working valiantly to respond to the renewed interest in the United Nations and to meet the rising demand in Member States for information on topical subjects but, paradoxically, they were being asked to do so within unrealistically small budgets and even with reduced staff. She appealed to all Governments to increase their financial assistance to the information centres in their countries.

18. Her ambition for DPI was to instil a dynamism that would carry it forward to the year 2000, rather than having a system that could do no more than react piecemeal to events. A solid and vital communication programme that would reach the greatest number of people was the best way to promote multilateralism and arouse a ground-swell of support for the Organization's whole range of activities throughout the world.

19. Mr. LAGORIO (Argentina), speaking as Chairman of the Committee on Information and introducing the Committee's report (A/46/21), said that the Committee had decided by consensus to recommend to the General Assembly the adoption of the two draft resolutions contained in section IV of the report, concerning information in service of humanity and United Nations public information policies and activities. It had been left to the Special

(Mr. Lagorio, Argentina)

Political Committee to agree on the preambular paragraphs that might be added to the draft resolutions.

20. As a result of discussions held on strengthening the capabilities of the network of United Nations information centres and services, reports from the centres would be submitted to the Committee on Information for its 1992 substantive session. Furthermore, the Committee had decided to recommend to the General Assembly the establishment of an information centre in Yemen, as well as the strengthening of four existing centres in Tehran, Dar es Salaam, Dhaka and Bujumbura.

21. He drew attention to the draft decision recommending the increase of the membership of the Committee by one and the appointment of Burkina Faso to fill the position, and expressed the hope that the Committee would endorse the consensus recommendation.

22. Seminars such as that held at Windhoek, Namibia, from 29 April to 3 May 1991, were very important and constructive; accordingly, the Committee on Information wished to encourage the Department of Public Information and UNESCO to continue their efforts to organize such seminars in other regions of the world.

23. Mr. ISAKSSON (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) said that, in accordance with its Constitution, UNESCO had made promoting the free flow of information one of its top priorities. Its new strategy for the development of communications and the free flow of information called upon the Organization to strive for the development of free, independent and pluralistic media in both public and private sectors.

24. Examples of activities conducted under the auspices of the new strategy included the Windhoek Seminar, which had stated in its Declaration that a similar seminar should be convened for journalists and managers of radio and television services in Africa.

25. In the field of East-West cooperation, UNESCO had helped to establish a regional media centre in Warsaw, which would respond to the urgent needs existing in Eastern European countries to train journalists, exchange information and documentation and introduce the principles and practices of independent and pluralistic media.

26. As where technical cooperation among developing countries was concerned, UNESCO had assisted in the organization of a Tricontinental Meeting on South-South Cooperation and Communication, which had been held in March/April 1991.

27. Finally, the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) had continued to support projects aimed at meeting the needs of the developing countries in the field of communications, information

(Mr. Isaksson, UNESCO)

and mass media infrastructures. However, the programme was in great need of more generous contributions from donors.

28. Mr. HIENSCH (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Community and its 12 member States, said that freedom of information was the basic tenet of any democratic society and should not be subject to any restriction, limitation or control. The Community wished to pay particular tribute to the journalists who had died over the previous year in the performance of their duty.

29. The Community considered that in order to reduce disparities between developed and developing countries, the developing countries' capacity to disseminate information should be enlarged and reinforced. To that end, cooperation should be carried out primarily through UNESCO and its programmes, such as the International Programme for the Development of Communication. The Windhoek Seminar and Declaration provided an excellent example of such cooperation.

30. The consensus existing in the Committee on Information should enable it to concentrate on the elaboration of guidelines for the Department of Public Information. The Committee should take care not to draft a long list of recommendations which DPI would not have the resources to implement. The operative parts of the draft resolution on United Nations information policies and activities should be streamlined in order to enable the Department to draw up an order of priorities. The Community welcomed the Committee on Information's decision to set up regular meetings between the members of the Bureau and representatives of regional groups.

31. The Twelve had always maintained that an information component should where necessary be an integral part of plans for United Nations conferences and peace-keeping operations and should not be subject to ad hoc arrangements at a later stage. They supported efforts to make DPI more professional and effective, and suggested that at its next session the Committee on Information should discuss the consolidation of public information activities in the Department.

32. United Nations information centres were an important tool for the Department in disseminating information on the United Nations. The Community welcomed the regional meetings of Directors of Information Centres since they provided an excellent opportunity to share and exchange experience and information.

33. Mr. MAHMOOD (Pakistan) said that his delegation deemed it imperative to promote cooperation with UNESCO, strengthen the United Nations information centres and services, and enhance training programmes for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries. He therefore urged the Department of Public Information to intensify its activities accordingly.

(Mr. Mahmood, Pakistan)

34. Referring to resolution 45/76 A, he expressed the hope that the Secretary-General would devote special attention to the issue of a new world information and communication order and report to the General Assembly on the measures adopted to carry out such a mandate. The current structure of information lacked balance, objectivity and fairness, since the enormous resources and technological superiority of a small group of countries, representing only 15 per cent of the world population, had enabled them to monopolize the flow of information to the world. The structure should therefore be democratized to provide a forum which allowed the participation of all nations in human development and international progress, thus evolving a broader and more balanced presentation of information. Current conditions in the world were particularly conducive to such a change.

35. Under the envisaged new information order, the developing countries should receive help to improve their overall media capacities, thus enabling them to participate freely in the global pursuit of information and communication and play a more substantive role in advocating freedom of information and expression, a concept which Pakistan was committed to upholding.

36. Experience in Pakistan had demonstrated the useful purpose served by United Nations radio broadcasts in projecting and disseminating information on the activities of the United Nations and its agencies. His country therefore reiterated the call by the Committee on Information to strengthen the Asian and Pacific Radio Unit, and called upon DPI to produce Urdu programmes through a regular unit at the Headquarters. His delegation also supported a strengthening of the Information Centres Division, given its potential for enhancing the image of the United Nations in the countries where the Centres were accredited.

37. While commending the work of the Information Products Division, his delegation believed that a strengthening of the Photo Unit would help improve its productivity. It also strongly supported the activities of the United Nations Correspondents' Association. Pakistan and other developing countries were inadequately represented on the staff of DPI, particularly at senior level; that situation should be redressed in keeping with the principle of geographical representation.

38. The activities of UNESCO, notably the International Programme for the Development of Communication and its efforts in relation to South-South cooperation, were instrumental to the creation of a new world information and communication order.

39. The role of those employed in the media must be appropriately recognized in order to encourage their professional performance with the ultimate aim of creating a more congenial climate for a better world. Finally, he stressed the importance of the free flow of information between States was vital, and access to information was a fundamental human right in the quest for global progress and prosperity.

40. Mr. POSSO (Ecuador) said that public information was an instrument for strengthening democracy, but measures were needed to protect the system from manipulation and disinformation at the hands of transnational media interests with their superior technical resources. In the interests of improving and asserting the independence of its information system, Ecuador had backed subregional and regional efforts to integrate information facilities and had played an active role in the Pool of News Agencies of the Non-Aligned Countries.

41. He recalled his delegation's support for the new world information and communication order and the consensus which had been achieved with regard to general guidelines and the tasks to be assigned to the Department of Public Information. In fulfilling those tasks, account must be taken of the vital need to rectify the imbalance between developing and developed countries with regard to access to and control of information sources, while seeking to combat commercial exploitation in the form of the self-interested dissemination of information by those countries with sophisticated technological resources.

42. With regard to technology transfer, the less advanced countries should combine to share advanced facilities and products in order break the monopoly of multinationals and improve individual countries' infrastructures, thereby enabling them to develop their own technology and output so as to counteract the imposition of programmes foreign to their cultures and traditions.

43. Efforts should also be made to devise a genuine code of conduct, based on individual rights but stressing the advantages of international cooperation and solidarity and the role of public communication as an instrument for the global development of peoples.

44. The United Nations public information system also needed to be improved; in planning its work, DPI should take account of areas warranting greater emphasis as a result of regional or international developments; and that would obviate the need for it to improvise special information measures at particular times, and might even enable it to influence world public opinion in specific fields.

45. The guidelines for United Nations public information merited special consideration, in that they covered such vital topics as environmental protection, measures to combat drugs trafficking, decolonization, elimination of inhuman and degrading practices and the promotion of human rights.

46. In addition to reflecting the day-to-day work of the Organization, the Department of Public Information should also be ready to concentrate its efforts in individual countries and regions when circumstances so warranted.

47. His delegation attached particular importance to the United Nations information centres, and was puzzled by the inconsistencies in their geographical location and the disparities in the material and human resources

(Mr. Posso, Ecuador)

available to different centres. Public information was a matter for professionals and specialists, and should not be left to United Nations technical cooperation agencies. His delegation had proposed in the Committee on Information that the Secretariat or a group of independent experts should study the location, structure and costs of existing information centres and put forward general conclusions which reflected the public information needs of the United Nations and the actual conditions prevailing in the countries it served, with the aim of establishing a network of rationally located information centres with broadly similar capacities and facilities.

48. In conclusion, his delegation believed that the Special Political Committee should support the work of the Committee on Information by giving it a specific mandate to continue defining the new world information order and determining its basic content. It also commended the willingness shown in the report of the Secretary-General (A/46/449) to meet the expectations of world public opinion in the face of the radical changes now occurring in the world.

49. Mr. EHLERS (Uruguay) said that debates in the Committee on Information had been constructive. The subject which had attracted most attention had undoubtedly been that of the information centres, a fact adequately reflected in the relevant paragraphs of the Committee's report and of draft resolution II. Discussion of that subject should continue with a view to determining guidelines for the opening of such centres; the guidelines contained the document on the subject submitted by the Secretariat needed to be further considered and extended if they were to secure the support and approval of Member States.

50. The periodic assessments of the centres by the Secretariat would enable the Committee on Information to produce a more incisive analysis, while coordination with UNDP and its offices was vital in ensuring adequate diffusion of information in countries without information centres.

51. Given that the resources of DPI could not be increased in real terms, all expenditure incurred by information centres on behalf of other organizations in the system should be reimbursed.

52. His Government was investigating possible ways of cooperating with the Department and neighbouring countries with a view to opening an information office in Montevideo, making full use of the limited resources available and in cooperation with the Buenos Aires Information Centre and possibly the UNDP office in Montevideo, an experiment which, if successful, could serve as a model for further initiatives. He welcomed the readiness of both the Department and the Argentine Government to cooperate on the matter, as reflected in paragraph 87 of the report of the Committee on Information.

53. His delegation supported the work programme aimed at bringing publication of the Yearbook of the United Nations up to date, and welcomed the progress in that respect detailed in part XIV of the report of the Secretary-General (A/46/449). It also attached considerable importance to the recommendation,

(Mr. Ehlers, Uruguay)

contained in paragraph 1 (s) of draft resolution II, that informal contacts between the Committee on Information and the Department of Public Information should be mentioned between sessions.

54. To help them in monitoring the work of DPI, Committee members needed to have more information concerning the action taken on the general guidelines laid down in the draft resolutions; in that respect, it would be useful for meetings to be held with regional representatives so as to ascertain what products were being produced and sent to individual regions. His delegation would like to have access to the radio, television and video programmes produced in Spanish for the Latin American region and was willing to respond to the request for cooperation in securing access to the mass media in its country and in disseminating information about the services offered by the United Nations. Greater knowledge of the products directed specifically at his delegation's region would help produce fruitful collaboration.

55. Mr. BACKSTROM (Sweden), speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries, said it was important to maintain the consensus reached the previous year on the topic of information in the service of humanity and the mandate for the United Nations public information policies and activities.

56. Within its present financial constraints, the Department of Public Information should be encouraged to be flexible to the new demands arising from the new momentum for political change in the world. Increased coordination between the specialized agencies of the United Nations should likewise be encouraged, and UNESCO had an important role to play in that respect. The role of the United Nations information centres had expanded world wide, and the Nordic countries therefore advocated further discussions on the establishment of new centres.

57. The Nordic countries supported the promotion of an independent and pluralistic press world wide, in view of the fundamental importance of the freedom of speech and information to the development of international relations. Accordingly, they were concerned over the existing imbalances in access to information, and would continue to help developing countries expand their communication capacity in order to improve the free flow of information to benefit the world as a whole.

58. Mr. SOUTELLO-ALVES (Brazil) said that the goal of promoting a new democratic world order would be undermined if the capacity to receive and impart information remained limited to a few segments of the international community. Policies should therefore be devised to enhance the communications infrastructures, capabilities and technical expertise of the developing countries on as equitable a basis as possible, thus furthering the principle that freedom of information and the press should act as the principal safeguard of a world order based on the free flow of ideas, people and goods. His delegation had been pleased to note that the draft resolution contained in document A/46/21 acknowledged that fact. It also welcomed the invitation to

(Mr. Soutello-Alves, Brazil)

Member States to submit observations and proposals on the means of furthering such policies.

59. The Department of Public Information should be capable of responding to the growing need for information about United Nations activities, notably by demonstrating flexibility in choosing priority areas for the dissemination of such information. Increased flexibility should however not detract from the collective responsibility of Member States for guiding and supervising the Department's work, and in that context his delegation welcomed the recommendation made in draft resolution II regarding periodic consultations between the Bureau of the Committee of Information and DPI. Within that framework, a useful discussion could be conducted on improving the daily briefings to delegations, which were entitled to comprehensive coverage of daily events at the United Nations.

60. Finally, regarding DPI coverage of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, to which his delegation attached great significance, he said that DPI should further discuss implementing a system-wide information programme, particularly since the environment was now deemed to be the highest priority issue suitable for inter-agency cooperation.

61. Mr. LAGORIO (Argentina) stressed the importance of the Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press, and welcomed the Windhoek seminar's recommendation that the General Assembly should include in its agenda the question of censorship as a serious human rights violation; that proposal was in keeping with the spirit of resolution 59 (I) of 14 December 1946, which declared that freedom of information was a fundamental human right. The Department of Public Information should hold further seminars of the same kind in other regions, particularly Latin America. He also supported the proposal to institute a freedom of information day as a vital step in consolidating the principle of the freedom of information and communication.

62. It would be very useful for private institutions and non-governmental organizations to take part in the work of the Committee on Information, and to give it the benefit of their experience. One of the main challenges facing that Committee was the vital need to initiate a serious and comprehensive study of the system of United Nations information centres and, in that connection, the reports to be considered by the Committee at its fourteenth session were of vital importance. He also supported the proposal put forward by Ecuador that a group of experts should be set up to study the whole question and propose possible courses of action. The informal consultation mechanism established during the Committee on Information's last session should provide a useful channel for discussing matters of interest in the intervals between sessions.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.

UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FORTY-SIXTH SESSION

Official Records

SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE
8th meeting
held on
Thursday, 24 October 1991
at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 8th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. PIBULSONGGRAM (Thailand)

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AGENDA ITEM 75: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 75: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued) (A/46/21, A/46/449; A/SPC/46/L.5 and L.6)

1. Mr. BEJO (Albania) said that the dissemination and exchange of information on the political, social, economic and cultural life of countries and peoples contributed to the improvement of international relations. Although progress had been made during the past decade, there was still a gap between the abilities of the developed and the developing countries to disseminate information. Improved access to more advanced information technology would enable the developing countries to narrow that gap and would consolidate cultural pluralism, thereby further strengthening international understanding. It was imperative to establish a new, more just and effective communication order, based on the free and balanced dissemination of information.

2. The sweeping political, economic and social changes in his country had been accompanied by quantitative and qualitative improvements in the field of information. His country was committed to the principles of the United Nations Charter, including the fundamental principles of freedom of information, expression and opinion. Full freedom of information was regarded as a basic human right, and the Albanian people had full access to foreign radio and television programmes. The pluralistic mass media reflected viewpoints of the various political parties, non-governmental organizations, groups and individuals. However, owing to its economic difficulties, Albania required international assistance to develop its information infrastructure.

3. It was deplorable that, notwithstanding the international trend towards greater democracy, the Serbian majority in Yugoslavia was suppressing the Albanian population - the third largest in that country - and that Albanian language information media in Yugoslavia had been closed down, a clear violation of the freedom of information. It would be in keeping with international law to send a United Nations information mission to investigate the violation of the rights of Albanians in Yugoslavia.

4. In conclusion, he said that his country would spare no effort in helping the international community to strengthen international peace and security and friendly relations among peoples.

5. Mr. SOUVANNAVONG (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that at a time when the world was experiencing rapid and profound changes, the task of informing world public opinion, in a timely and accurate manner, of what really happened was of paramount importance. The Department of Public Information (DPI) of the United Nations had an important role to play, for the legitimate interests of developing countries, and in particular the least developed among them, generally were not adequately covered by the private

(Mr. Souvannavong, Lao People's Democratic Republic)

international press. For example, the private press would readily publicize a coup or a failed coup in any poor developing country, but would very rarely inform the world about the basic needs or poverty of the people of the third world. General Assembly resolution 45/76 was highly relevant in that regard, and he drew particular attention to subparagraph (a) of the operative paragraph. To attain the objectives outlined in that paragraph, the developed countries with advanced information and communication technology should expand their cooperation with developing countries with respect to financing, technology and equipment, in order to redress existing imbalances between the two categories of countries for the purpose of promoting understanding and friendship among nations.

6. His country's new Constitution proclaimed the right of all Lao citizens to enjoy freedom of speech, the press and assembly. The full exercise of those rights would help improve the information and communication media in his country. Additional assistance, including training programmes and seminars, from the international community and the United Nations system would help to strengthen his country's information and communication capacities.

7. In the process of building a balanced and equitable world information and communication order, it was essential to adhere to the sacrosanct principles of the United Nations Charter, in particular, the principles of equality, respect for each country's independence and non-interference in the internal affairs of other States. Information should not be used to violate the independence and sovereignty of States. His delegation hoped that the resolution on questions relating to information to be adopted at the current session would mark the beginning of a new stage in the development of world information and communication.

8. Mr. MOTOMURA (Japan) stressed the importance of the free flow of information for all societies, in times of peace as well as discord. In the contemporary highly interdependent world, the free flow of information and the maintenance of adequate channels of communication were essential for economic development and social progress, and increased efforts were needed at the national and international levels to enable the media to achieve those objectives. His delegation hoped that the draft resolutions before the Committee (A/SPC/46/L.5 and L.6) would be adopted unanimously, thus consolidating the hard-won consensus on conceptual issues relating to information and fostering a new spirit of international cooperation.

9. In order to broaden that consensus, the Committee should consider how to ensure a freer, wider and better balanced flow of information and should review United Nations public information policies and activities, while avoiding ideological and philosophical debate. The best way to correct imbalances in the field of information and communication and to ensure the broader dissemination of information concerning all countries was not by adopting declarations and resolutions but, rather, by undertaking

(Mr. Motomura, Japan)

international cooperative efforts. His own country provided financial and technical cooperation in the field of information and communication through bilateral and multilateral channels, including training activities both in Japan and in the developing countries themselves, and by providing assistance to improve telecommunications infrastructures and broadcasting systems. The telecommunications sector would continue to occupy an important place in its future official development assistance.

10. DPI clearly was striving to meet the ever-growing demands being placed on it, and his delegation commended the Department for its efforts to improve its effectiveness by rationalizing its work and administrative structure. The activities and programmes of DPI should not result in an expansion of its administrative structure, nor should they entail excessive financial obligations. It would be helpful if DPI established priorities among the items on its agenda according to their relevance and cost-effectiveness.

11. His delegation welcomed the pragmatic nature of the discussions held in the Committee on Information during the past year. The discussions focusing on the activities of the United Nations information centres, the Yearbook of the United Nations and the question of the flexibility of DPI activities in times of crisis had been especially fruitful, and his delegation hoped that the pragmatic approach would continue.

12. Mr. FAMZY (Egypt) said that imbalances in the field of information must be redressed so as to restructure the existing information order to ensure a free and balanced flow of information with the participation of all nations. To promote that goal, DPI could help organize the reciprocal flow of information between regions, which could play a role in preventive diplomacy and set the stage for successful peacemaking. While his delegation appreciated the Department's efforts to improve the work of the United Nations information centres, a comprehensive plan was needed to enhance their effectiveness; by listing the needs of each centre and indicating how it served its country and region, such a plan could provide a clearer vision of its role. Innovative thinking was essential to achieve that goal.

13. The training programmes organized by DPI for broadcasters and journalists were commendable, and the Cairo Institute for African Broadcasters was prepared to cooperate with DPI in organizing similar programmes in the future. His delegation also welcomed the efforts of DPI, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in organizing the Seminar on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press, held at Windhoek, Namibia. Lastly, his delegation appreciated the activities conducted by DPI to implement General Assembly resolutions on the struggle against apartheid, the question of Palestine, the Palestinian intifadah and social and economic questions.

14. Mr. KHANI (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the activities and responsibilities of the Department of Public Information should be increased, as should its cooperation with the developing countries, in order to help eliminate the current distortion of facts and disparate flow of information. The new UNESCO strategy emphasized wider cooperation based on dialogue and mutual understanding, and any new world information and communications order should naturally be in keeping with the principles of the United Nations Charter and other relevant international instruments. In disseminating information and guaranteeing freedom of publication, the sovereignty, social values and cultural traditions of all States should be respected in order to promote friendship and peace.

15. Referring to document A/46/21, he underlined the fundamental importance of DPI in publicizing the aims and principles of the United Nations, particularly in those countries which disregarded or defied its resolutions. The Department should focus more attention on that aspect of its work. It would, however, be unable to carry out its role to maximum effect unless it were strengthened and assured of the requisite financial and technical resources.

16. Efforts should also be made to increase cooperation between UNESCO and DPI, with continued technical assistance and improvement of the communications infrastructure of the developing countries occurring within the framework of the UNESCO International Programme for the Development of Communication.

17. Cooperation between DPI and regional organizations, and between it and the News Agencies Pool of the Non-Aligned Countries, should also be increased, and increased efforts should be made to reflect the activities of the Non-Aligned Movement, publish its resolutions, and implement the programmes intended to develop information in the developing countries, where special attention should be given to journalistic training. The Middle Eastern Unit should be strengthened by providing it with adequate financial resources and appropriate expertise to ensure its effectiveness. The United Nations should continue to send press missions to areas, such as the occupied Arab territories, where United Nations resolutions were disregarded and international conventions violated.

18. His delegation welcomed the issue of press releases in the official languages, and their reissue in cooperation with publishing houses in the third world. He stressed that resolutions 44/50 and 45/67 represented the minimum basis for cooperation between the developing and the industrialized countries, and emphasized that DPI staff should be engaged on the basis of equitable geographical distribution, since those originating from a particular area were better equipped to select the type of news and information to be broadcast to the area concerned and better able to present it to the public in an appropriate manner.

(Mr. Khani, Syrian Arab Republic)

19. The role of the United Nations information centres should be strengthened, particularly in the third world, as the voice of the United Nations would otherwise go unheard. The recommendation to publish in Arabic and Spanish the annual press release containing the resolutions, decisions and voting results adopted at each General Assembly was also important, since that would facilitate the work of foreign ministries and other institutions in the Arab world elsewhere.

20. Mr. MIRDHA (India) said that free media were important catalysts for human freedom and development at the national and global levels. Recent dramatic changes in the global political environment and the increasing urgency of the world's economic and social problems made the work of DPI even more relevant. His delegation was pleased that DPI had been able to respond to some extent to that urgency and hoped that its continuing efforts would lead to the optimal use of its limited resources.

21. His delegation welcomed the consensus reached in the Committee on Information on its recommendations to the General Assembly, and would continue to work to build on that consensus. India's free, pluralistic and active press had been a pillar of strength for its democratic system and a vehicle for economic progress for all segments of the population, and his delegation therefore encouraged the convening of seminars similar to the Windhoek Seminar in other parts of the world. Moreover, his Government would be pleased to share its many years of experience in the organization and operation of a free, independent press in whatever manner DPI deemed appropriate.

22. To redress the serious imbalance which existed in the field of information, technological communication infrastructures needed to be built up in many developing countries. In that context, his delegation supported the International Programme for the Development of Communication administered by UNESCO and urged DPI, intergovernmental organizations and developed countries to provide increased support to that programme and directly to developing countries.

23. DPI's efforts to give special attention to areas of concern to developing countries were commendable and the Department should continue to focus on the dissemination of information on such issues as the recent developments in South Africa and the Middle East, the promotion of international peace and security, recent developments in nuclear disarmament, United Nations efforts in peacemaking and peace-keeping, the environment, human rights and international economic cooperation, with particular attention to the development of the developing countries. It was particularly important to prepare analytical information on the work of the Organization, a task that called for new strategies and, very probably, greater resources. With the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations only four years away, DPI also should consider the most appropriate means of ensuring the success of the

(Mr. Mirdha, India)

major publicity activities it would be called upon to perform upon that occasion.

24. While his delegation could understand the desire for greater flexibility in choosing priority areas for the dissemination of information on the work of the United Nations expressed by the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information, it believed that DPI should act within the broad yet flexible guidelines collectively decided upon by Member States. Accordingly, he welcomed the recommendations by the Committee on Information, as reflected in draft resolutions A/SPC/46/L.5 and L.6, that the Bureau of that Committee should periodically consult with DPI with a view to enhancing the Department's efficiency. In conclusion, he emphasized that the independence, freedom and plurality of the media at the national and international levels must be accompanied by balance, objectivity and tolerance of diverse cultural and national values.

25. Mr. Chan Ho HA (Korea) said that much of the international community was still denied participation in the network of global exchange which modern technological advances had made possible. His delegation was therefore pleased to note the consensus attained by the Committee on Information regarding cooperation in that respect. It also looked forward to witnessing the tangible results of the willingness expressed by some developed countries to provide the developing countries with the necessary funds and technology. Meanwhile, the latter should also pursue a self-reliant system of South-South cooperation amongst themselves.

26. Since 1984, Korea had been implementing a successful training programme for media producers under the auspices of the UNESCO International Programme for the Development of Communications. It had also contributed $US 400,000 to the International Informatics Programme for 1990-1991, and would continue to participate in activities designed to improve the situation in the developing countries, whilst expecting the United Nations to act more effectively to enhance their communications infrastructures and capabilities.

27. DPI should not play a larger role in keeping with the new broader and more varied role of the United Nations itself. His delegation therefore supported the Department's effort to rationalize its work and revitalize its structure, as conducive to promoting a more positive image of the Organization to the world at large. In that connection, it also hoped that the functions of all United Nations information centres would be further strengthened, for the Organization could not hope to fulfil its purpose unless the peoples of the world were fully apprised of its aims and principles. DPI should therefore focus in particular on those of the Organization's activities which had highest priority. Finally, he endorsed the idea of consultations between the Committee on Information and DPI in order to help the latter perform its tasks with the requisite flexibility and expediency.

28. Ms. LUO Xa (China) said that the new international information and communications order, like the new international order, should be based on the principles of the United Nations Charter, with special emphasis on deepening mutual respect and expanding cooperation on an equal footing. Under the new order, the sovereignty of all States should be respected, along with their cultural values and traditions. All countries, despite their inherent differences in character, shared a common interest in promoting international understanding and strengthening friendship and cooperation among nations, in which respect the dissemination of information had an important role to play. The developed countries should ensure that the developing countries were able to contribute more actively to the information process on an international scale by ensuring that they had the necessary funds and technology.

29. Over the past two years, welcome progress had been made in the United Nations with respect to information issues. Much remained to be done, however, and her delegation was prepared to work together with others in seeking common ground.

30. Lastly, her delegation noted the useful work done by DPI over the past year in promoting international cooperation in the information field.

31. Mr. SERME (Burkina Faso) said that the importance attached to information in today's closely linked world was exemplified by the increase in membership of the Committee on Information over the past 12 years. Burkina Faso shared that emphasis on information, actively publicizing the activities of the United Nations through a broadcast programme which was produced with the cooperation of the United Nations information centre in Ouagadougou. The centre's assistance to the national media and sustained contacts with the local authorities were extremely valuable. The UNESCO Club in Burkina Faso had recently seen its emphasis on environment and development reinforced by UNESCO's decision, which his Government fully supported, to give priority to that issue in preparation for the 1992 Conference on the subject. Burkina Faso was also active in the African National Television and Broadcasting Union.

32. Information was a valuable tool for development. Television and radio were used in Burkina Faso to disseminate information on farming techniques, promote awareness of environmental issues, provide health education and teach national languages. A private broadcasting station had recently been established, an information code governing the rights and duties of journalists had been adopted.

33. The involvement of the written press in the democratization of political life in Burkina Faso had led the Government to support the Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press and to recommend that a similar seminar should be held for radio and television journalists. However, the availability of objective written information in developing countries was limited by, inter alia, illiteracy and low levels of school attendance. Transfer of technology was needed in order to democratize

(Mr. Serme, Burkina Faso)

the means of information, which would in turn democratize and balance information itself. The end of the cold war should provide developing countries with the opportunity to dispel inaccurate representations of them in foreign media. They should use the technology of information in order to break out of the rut they were in.

34. Mr. ZVONKO (Belarus) said that the interdependence of the world was in no small measure the product of exchange of information in various fields. Now the super-Powers had stopped trying to throw each other onto the scrap-heap of history, the sphere of information would hopefully be purified of ideological contamination.

35. The attempted coup in the Soviet Union had illustrated the vital importance of accurate information by revealing what a powerful influence could be exercised through control of the media. The independent media had been one of the primary targets of the coup organizers but, by mobilizing public opinion against the plotters they had ensured the victory of democracy. The media in Belarus, in particular, were becoming increasingly objective, unbiased and effective, and the independence they had acquired since the coup attempt was shortly to be given formal expression in a new law on the press.

36. As a new member of the Committee on Information, Belarus found it particularly noteworthy that the Committee had for the second year in succession adopted its recommendations without a vote. That augured well for the continued transition in its work from sterile debate to action-oriented decisions. The call for the facilitation of access by the developing countries to advanced communication technology available on the open market, contained in the draft resolution on information in service of humanity (A/SPC/46/L.5) should be a major priority for the Committee on Information.

37. His delegation particularly wished to endorse the cooperation between the Department of Public Information and UNESCO, as detailed in paragraphs 6 to 10 of the Secretary-General's report (A/46/449), and welcomed the Department's focus on such topics as peace-keeping, disarmament, apartheid, decolonization, human rights, narcotics control and economic, social and environmental issues.

38. His delegation hoped that the Department would also show flexibility in tackling other new, but no less important, issues. One such issue was the Chernobyl accident, the disastrous consequences of which for the Belarusian people were now becoming increasingly apparent and which also had transboundary implications. Belarus wished to express its readiness to cooperate with the United Nations information centre in Moscow concerning the Chernobyl incident, since it was essential to overcome barriers of secrecy in the face of a tragedy affecting all of mankind.

39. Mr. REFIRASME (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that information was fundamental to international relations and to all economies, and its free flow could make a substantial contribution to development and to trust among countries. Despite the end of the cold war, there was still a division separating the rest of the world from the industrialized countries, whose monopoly of information technology gave them a dominance which threatened the sovereignty, identity and independence of the developing countries. For that reason his delegation wished to emphasize its commitment to the establishment a new world information and communication order, and to endorse the proposal by Pakistan that the Secretary-General should pay particular attention to that issue. The developing countries should focus attention on encouraging new media not only at the national level but also through regional exchanges, and international bodies, particularly DPI, should support their efforts in that direction. In that context, his delegation noted with satisfaction the seminar which had taken place in Windhoek, Namibia, on developing an independent pluralistic press in Africa, and hoped that similar meetings would be organized for other regions.

40. In view of the increasing responsibilities of the United Nations, the activities of DPI should receive increased support. The United Nations information centres had a pivotal role to play in promoting the image of the Organization, and his delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's decision to strengthen the centres: the one in Teheran had for a number of years been understaffed and short of resources. The Committee on Information, at its next session, should focus on the problems connected with information centres, and it might be worth considering the possibility of establishing a working group to find suitable solutions.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.

UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FORTY-SIXTH SESSION

Official Records

SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE
9th meeting
held on
Friday, 25 October 1991
at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 9th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. SCHAFER (Germany)
(Vice-Chairman)

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AGENDA ITEM 75: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 75: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued) A/46/21, 449 and 582, A/SPC/46/L.5-8)

1. Mr. BOUTSKO (Ukraine) said that the draft resolutions (A/SPC/46/L.5 and 6) could be viewed as a turning point in the work of the Committee on Information and he hoped that they would be approved by consensus, thereby overcoming the confrontation and ideologically motivated positions prevalent in the past.

2. He commended the work of the Department of Public Information (DPI), with particular reference to its cooperation with the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries and its active role in publicizing United Nations activities in the fields of disarmament, human rights and the status and role of women. A number of the Department's publications were commendable, but chapter XV of the report of the Secretary-General (A/46/449), entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations information centres and services" should have contained at least preliminary information regarding the issues raised by a number of delegations, including Poland, Bulgaria and Yemen. He also called on the Department to give guidance concerning the establishment of information centres to those Member States which required it.

3. He asked for additional information on the composition of the round table for the European press due to be held in November 1991 and on the possible use of DPI expertise in the coverage of elections based on its experience in Namibia, Nicaragua and Haiti, bearing in mind that, on 1 December 1991, the Ukrainian people was to vote on Ukrainian independence and freely elect a national president for the first time in its history.

4. Despite the large number of journalists accredited to the United Nations, information about the full range of its activities was still failing to reach the public and efforts to make the system work must be stepped up by investigating problems relating to the working environment of United Nations correspondents, the preparation and distribution of materials to them, and other services offered by the Department of Public Information.

5. Mr. CHOWDHURY (Nepal) said that his country attached great importance to the freedom of expression and had constitutionally guaranteed the right to information. The activities of the world media and the wider dissemination of information had played a crucial role in the success of the movement for the restoration of democracy in his country in 1990. His Government had now adopted a new press law guaranteeing freedom of opinion and expression, which would greatly contribute to consolidating democracy.

6. The existing disparity in the flow of information between developing and developed countries was due to the former's lack of access to modern technology, and the United Nations could play an effective role in bridging

(Mr. Chowdhury, Nepal)

that gap by promoting the development of infrastructure, human resources and technology transfer in the field of information. His delegation supported the call for a new world information and communication order, giving special attention to the difficulties of the developing countries, particularly the least developed ones.

7. The unhindered flow of information was a first step in preventing conflicts and disputes and, in that connection, he commended the work of DPI and of the United Nations information centres operating in coordination with UNDP and UNESCO. The information centres represented an important link with the developing countries and feedback from them would be useful in evaluating public reaction and the effectiveness of the United Nations work. He felt that broad guidelines and standards should be laid down for the Department and the information centres, and that provision should be made for built-in flexibility and easier access to funding.

8. Provision of information in local languages was very important, and he called for more United Nations-related materials to be published in Nepali and for that language to be included in the Asia unit of the United Nations radio service.

9. He welcomed the comprehensive report of the Secretary-General and called for greater dissemination of information on the least developed countries through United Nations agencies. He commended the report of the Committee on Information and the two draft resolutions it contained, referring in particular to the provision concerning coordination with UNDP and UNESCO and to paragraph 3 of draft resolution B, requesting the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of a system-wide information programme for the Conference on Environment and Development to be held in 1992.

10. Mr. SALAS (Mexico) said that the Organization's growing role as a major force in international affairs had led to increasing public scrutiny of its work and that advances in information technology, had made it possible to publicize its activities throughout the world. The growing demand for information had placed greater responsibility on the Committee on Information and, in that connection, the establishment of machinery to maintain intersessional contacts between DPI and that Committee was of great importance.

11. Careful consideration should also be given to the information centres as a vital point of contact with the media in Member States and a key element in promoting knowledge and understanding of the United Nations work. The Committee on Information should continue to study the geographical location, funding, internal organization and efficiency of the centres, which needed to be given clear and appropriate guidelines. In that connection, he welcomed the commitment given in draft resolution B not to reduce the level of efficiency of the centres.

(Mr. Salas, Mexico)

12. The priorities for the work of DPI contained in paragraph 1 (b) (iii) of draft resolution B should be updated and amended in the light of developments in the work of the Organization and international events. Finally, the consensus reached in 1990 should act as an impetus for future action rather than a strait-jacket leading to immobility. The time was ripe to consolidate the free dissemination of information, with due respect for the cultural diversity that was a vital element in a world in the throes of political change.

13. Mr. NEJEDLY (Czechoslovakia) said that the Gulf War and the events of recent days had demonstrated that information and international communication were a reliable way of protecting human rights and democracy. In view of its historical experience, Czechoslovakia was well-placed to appreciate just how fundamental free and truthful information was to the existence of democracy and a State ruled by law. Recent and forthcoming changes in Czechoslovak legislation afforded legal guarantees of freedom of speech and expression. Democratic Czechoslovakia had opened its boundaries to the free flow of views, ideas and information. Within the framework of the subregional initiative, Hexagonale, Czechoslovakia was an active member of the special working group on information which was developing a joint strategy in the field of information and communication.

14. As ideology lost its impact on the exchange of information, there was a new opportunity for international organizations and institutions to assert the supranational, democratic and independent nature of information. The United Nations and the Committee on Information should become even more active in guaranteeing the free exchange of independent and pluralistic information and strengthening the national communications capacities of the developing countries. It should also ensure the best possible professional standards for journalists all over the world. In that connection, Czechoslovakia wished to express its readiness to participate in drafting an international code of ethics for journalists.

15. Mr. MIHOV (Bulgaria) said that the recent profound changes in various parts of the world had highlighted the importance of freedom of information and freedom of expression of opinion. Bulgaria's conviction that the right of the individual to obtain and disseminate information was an essential part of democratic society had been reflected in its new Constitution and also, more practically, in the Bulgarian mass media's contribution to the process of democratic change. The new international climate meant that the dissemination and free exchange of information was an increasingly important factor for maintaining international peace and security.

16. His delegation shared the view that eliminating existing disproportions in the flow of information was in the interests of all members of the international community. In that connection, UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication deserved special attention and support. The provisions of the draft resolution submitted by the Committee on

(Mr. Mihov, Bulgaria)

Information (A/SPC/46/L.5), particularly those relating to the facilitation of accsss by the developing countries to advanced communication technology, were timely, useful and relevant.

17. DPI was confronted with radically new tasks as the role and reputation of the United Nations were the object of growing confidence. His delegation congratulated the Department on its work in addressing the new challenges within the restricting framework of a tight budget. An important aspect of DPI's activity was its encouragement, in conjunction with UNESCO, of the establishment of an independent and pluralistic press. His delegation therefore appreciated the positive experience of the Windhoek Seminar on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press, and welcomed such publications by the Department as the World Media Handbook. In view of the requirement that the Department should react swiftly to international events it supported the idea contained in draft resolution A/SPC/46/L.6 that the Committee of Information should hold regular consultations with DPI.

18. In conclusion, since Bulgaria considered that strengthening its cooperation with international information agencies and institutions would be a further stimulus to successful democratization, it attached particular importance to the opening of a United Nations information centre in the Bulgarian capital. Such a step would be fully consonant with Bulgaria's commitment to the principles and ideals of the United Nations and its support for the increasingly active role of the Organization.

19. Mrs. MAIKARFI (Niger) said that her delegation was pleased to note that despite limited resources the Department of Public Information had succeeded in raising awareness of the activities of the United Nations. It welcomed the training programmes organized by the Department and the cooperation between DPI and regional organizations, third world press agencies, and other United Nations bodies. It also welcomed the revitalization of United Nations information centres, but considered that the procedure for establishing such centres should be regulated in the interests of equity among regions. Her delegation wished to express its satisfaction with the successful discussions which had taken place in the Committee on Information and fully supported draft resolution A/SPC/46/L.5 which stressed the need to direct resources towards improving all aspects of communications in developing countries. It also supported draft resolution A/SPC/46/L.6.

20. Despite recent progress, the establishment of a new world information and communication order was still a long way off. It was imperative to reduce the considerable disparity between developing and developed countries in the field of communication. Niger had made information a high priority since it enabled the illiterate majority of the population to become more aware of problems of development and had proved particularly important in combating desertification. However, the lack of modern communication technologies hampered the authorities of her country in their campaigns to reduce illiteracy and to halt the advance of the desert. The West should show itself

(Mrs. Maikarfi, Niger)

to be more understanding of the situation of developing countries by providing appropriate assistance that was indispensable to economic growth.

21. Mr. SHOGOFAN (Afghanistan) said that recent dramatic political changes had revealed the great importance of the flow of information and news and their role in shaping events. The United Nations and Member States faced serious economic, social and environmental problems, and in tackling them, issues related to information and communication should be given greater attention.

22. The time had come to address the establishment of a new and just international information and communication order. In that context, his delegation wished to congratulate DPI on its work on such serious issues as the maintenance of international peace and security, economic problems and problems related to the environment, health, narcotic drugs and human rights.

23. His delegation supported the two draft resolutions and the draft decision recommended by the Committee on Information and contained in its report (A/46/21). In view of the changes in the world and in the United Nations, the Committee on Information and DPI should adapt themselves to the new realities: that meant working seriously towards the establishment of a new international information and communication order. Member States and international organizations should extend technical and financial assistance to the Department in order to enable it to fulfil such an important task. Particularly in the least developed countries, communications required technical and financial cooperation.

24. Since 1987, new and independent mass media had emerged in Afghanistan which had actively supported the efforts of the United Nations in bringing peace to Afghanistan and in its reconstruction. The United Nations information centre in Kabul also had an important role to play and it should expand its technical assistance to the mass media of Afghanistan.

25. Mrs. LEGWAILA (Botswana) said that DPI had tried in recent years to work effectively, but it needed more funding in order to implement new programmes and projects. Her delegation was pleased to note, however, that despite the financial constraints on the Department some vital campaigns such as the Anti-Apartheid programmes still existed. The Programmes should not only continue but should be strengthened in terms of both financial and human resources until it was clear that the changes that were now taking place in South Africa were irreversible. Apartheid could not be declared dead until it was dead.

26. Information was an important element in a rapidly changing world and played a key role in the maintenance of peace. Her delegation hoped that the United Nations, through DPI, would help reach that objective by publicizing detailed and unbiased facts on world issues. It should also play a leading role in closing the gap between the developed and developing countries in

(Mrs. Legwaila, Botswana)

their capacities to disseminate information. To that end, it was vital that DPI and UNESCO should cooperate as closely as possible. Her delegation encouraged the Department to continue establishing United Nations information centres wherever the need arose, and to strengthen existing ones.

27. Mr. HOLGER (Chile) said that, with the growing influence of the Organization, public information was of particular importance, the work of DPI was a two-way process involving not only the dissemination of information but also the gathering of reactions and views on United Nations activities from world public opinion and the Member States' governments.

28. He shared the concern at the Department's lack of resources but felt that the reports of the Secretary-General, the Committee on Information and the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information offered a full and clear picture of the current information situation within the Organization. Useful and effective coverage had been provided of regional conflicts and peace-keeping, disarmament, human rights, economic, social and environmental issues, drug abuse control and apartheid, and all of those issues were fully covered in the two draft resolutions, which he hoped would be adopted by consensus.

29. He welcomed the plan to bring up to date the publication of the Yearbook of the United Nations and The Windhoek Seminar and Declaration were of great significance, and he hoped that similar events would be held in other regions. He also highlighted the important role of the United Nations information centres in transmitting information to and from the Member States, stressing the value of the periodic meetings organized by DPI for Directors, information officers and librarians.

30. Mr. KARANOY (Indonesia) said that communication and information were inseparably linked to the advancement of political stability, economic well-being, social justice and cultural identity. Although a revolution was taking place in communication technology, but the developing countries were denied the opportunity to benefit fully from it. Indonesia and other non-aligned countries considered that progress towards a new world information and communication order was a prerequisite for developing nations if they were to promote their development goals in accordance with their own needs and interests. As a further step towards removing the inequalities inherent in the communication and information system, it might be possible to initiate a programme of giving awards to recognized individuals, institutions and countries which had made effective use of information and communication to promote social progress and improve living standards in greater freedom.

31. Developing nations had assiduously sought to strengthen cooperation with the United Nations and more particular between it and the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries. His delegation especially appreciated the daily news dispatches issued by DPI in conjunction with the Pool.

(Mr. Karanov, Indonesia)

32. Within the framework of Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries, Indonesia had conducted media training programmes with the participation of many countries from Asia, the Pacific, Africa and Latin America. It had welcomed Namibia into the programme in 1991.

33. His delegation wished to draw particular attention to the UNESCO-sponsored International Programme for the Development of Communication and to support the appeal to all member States and organizations for contributions to facilitate the speedy and continuous implementation of the Programme. The Windhoek Seminar, organized jointly by UNESCO and the United Nations, should provide a model for further seminars to be convened in other regions of the world. The endeavours of DPI in expanding contact with non-governmental organizations and educational groups, strengthening information centres and implementing training programmes for media professionals from developing countries, as well as its dissemination of information on the Middle East and apartheid, deserved special commendation. The United Nations Information Centre in Jakarta had organized extremely useful training sessions, produced television programmes in the Indonesian language and assisted in the printing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Indonesian.

34. Mr. POPESCU (Romania) said that the fundamental human right of freedom of expression and opinion was one of the basic elements of the new constitution shortly to be adopted in his country. The development of independent public and private media was particularly important for countries facing a difficult transition to new social and economic structures. Romania appreciated the assistance offered by various national and international institutions in improving media technology and infrastructures, and he looked forward to further multilateral cooperation, especially for development projects in the field of information.

35. With the increasing involvement of the United Nations in international affairs, it was very important for the Organization itself to provide information on its activities. The DPI was particularly important in that respect and he felt that its activities should be focused on the continuing efforts of the Secretary-General, the Security Council and the General Assembly to maintain peace and stability in the world, the promotion of human rights, environmental protection, the status of women and the special care of children, drug abuse and trafficking, terrorism, humanitarian aid, and social and economic development. Despite the limited financial and human resources available, funds should be allocated to cover unexpected but important international events requiring United Nations involvement.

36. He welcomed the initiative of the thirteenth session of the Committee on Information in holding a debate on the functioning and coordination of the United Nations information centres, some of the conclusions of which had been included in draft resolution B. His Government fully supported the activities of the Bucharest Centre and was considering further increases in its financial

(Mr. Popescu, Romania)

contribution, despite serious economic obstacles, in order to meet the great demand for information from national institutions, the mass media and others.

37. Mr. ALSAIDI (Yemen) said that given the importance of information as a means of promoting international peace and security, efforts to bridge the gap between the information capacities of the industrialized developing countries should continue. His delegation commended the role played by DPI; it welcomed the encounters for journalists on the Palestinian question which DPI had co-sponsored and requested that the Palestinian intifadah should be given full coverage. It also welcomed the Windhoek Declaration, and called for the holding of a similar seminar on promoting an independent and pluralistic Arab press.

38. With a view to broadening the current process to include the Arab world, his delegation had requested the establishment of a United Nations information centre in Sana'a. As a democratic country Yemen had a free and pluralistic press, and yet lacked the resources which would facilitate the development of democratic institutions. An information centre would enhance the two-way flow of information between the Yemeni press and the Organization, and would also be able to assist in training a press corps which was more readily able to assimilate the changes taking place world wide. Pursuant to document A/SPC/46/L.6, the request had been approved for recommendation to the General Assembly, and his delegation therefore wished to express its thanks to those concerned.

39. Mr. TRINH XUAN LANG (Viet Nam) said that the role of information and communication had become more vital than ever at a time of profound change and unprecedented advances in science and technology. Freedom of information was a fundamental human right, but information was really a two-edged sword. Accurate, objective information reflecting national and cultural diversity as well as universal human values helped promote peace, international cooperation and development; but misleading information could have unimaginable consequences. Genuine freedom of information must be accompanied by a sense of responsibility. The abuse of that freedom to impose ideas on others or to attempt to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries must be resolutely condemned.

40. Unfortunately, the progress in communications technology had not narrowed the gap between developed and developing countries. A few news agencies and mass media from a few developed countries dominated the existing information system, giving only the one-sided views and values of the developed countries while underrepresenting or misrepresenting those of the developing countries. That neither served genuine freedom of information nor promoted an exchange among equals.

41. Thus, the establishment of a more balanced and effective new international information and communication order, as advocated by UNESCO and the movement of non-aligned countries since the late 1970s, was still

(Mr. Trinh Xuan Lang, Viet Nam)

imperative. That new order must respect the cultural and social values and the sovereignty of all States and facilitate a free flow of information in the interests of international peace and security, understanding and cooperation.

42. In the light of the rapid technological advances, the developing countries should band together to give priority to modernizing their media infrastructures, and the technologically advanced countries should assist them. The United Nations system itself should progress from mere declarations to practical action. Such combined efforts would certainly increase the participation of the developing countries in the international information system, gradually reduce disparities and finally bridge the gap between the developed and developing countries.

43. Since it was not currently feasible for every country to have a United Nations information centre, DPI should make it a priority to provide those without an information centre with more information materials, so that all countries could benefit from the common resources.

44. The welcome consensus reached by the Committee on Information at its latest session augured well, and showed a recognition that the shortcomings of the existing international information system must be remedied through international cooperation that would work to the benefit of the developing countries. The United Nations and its specialized agencies had enormous potential for promoting such cooperation, and DPI, while addressing the many other topics of concern to it, should concentrate on that task. UNESCO, through its International Programme for the Development of Communication, had given valuable assistance in that regard.

45. Viet Nam itself was committed to freedom of the press and of information, as guaranteed by its Constitution and legislation, and would welcome all bilateral and international assistance to develop its mass media systems.

46. Mr. KUWONU (Togo) said that the movement away from confrontation between political blocs and towards democracy had induced positive change in most of Africa. The peoples of the continent were fighting for their basic rights, among them freedom of expression, opinion and information, which presupposed the existence of an independent press free from all pressure and exclusively at the service of the people. At a national conference held in July and August 1991, the Togolese people had emphasized the crucial role of the media in shaping communal thinking and the need to create conditions conducive to the establishment of a new information order that would be more democratic, just and objective, and to that end had adopted resolutions on the freedom and independence of the press. Togo's Government of National Renewal was determined to establish an independent, pluralistic press as a factor in the movement towards democracy currently under way in the country, and to make the establishment of a new world information and communication order one of the priorities of its foreign policy.

(Mr. Kuwonu, Togo)

47. The report of the Committee on Information (A/46/21) showed that there was consensus on the need to favour a better dissemination of information, eliminate imbalances, revitalize information activities and increase the Committee's effectiveness. Togo fully supported the draft resolution on information in service of humanity, contained in document A/SPC/46/L.5, in particular subparagraph (a). Particular efforts should be made to ensure diverse sources of information and free access to information. That would require doing away with the monopoly of the developed countries on the technical advances in the area of communication and allowing the developing countries to catch up with the latest developments.

48. The Windhoek Declaration had emphasized a number of priority concerns with respect to the preservation of press freedom and diversity, and Togo had already endorsed those concerns and enacted provisions to ensure the freedom, independence and pluralism of the media, among them the abolition of censorship.

49. As the focal point for information within the United Nations system, DPI was working with admirable dynamism to deal with a number of the major global concerns. The Department was also to be commended for its enhanced cooperation with UNESCO and with the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries, and it should expand its training programmes for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries in order to produce more skilled professionals.

50. Peace and security under the new global political order that now seemed to be taking shape could be guaranteed only by the elimination of all disparities existing between the developed and the developing countries, including imbalances in information.

51. Information should not merely report the facts but should explain changes and help develop and train minds. It was a form of mobilization. The media should convey a total philosophy of the times, and perhaps an ideology that gave cause for hope.

52. Mr. ZEGHIB (Algeria) observed that the perception of the dramatic events that had shaken the world had become more of a factor than the events themselves, reflecting the importance of communication and information in shaping public opinion and, by extension, the modern world. All the barriers that had been set up to prevent the free circulation of ideas and the free expression of opinions were collapsing of their own accord, thanks to the formidable technological advances in communication.

53. In the belief that peace and understanding among peoples could not come about without freedom of information and thought, the non-aligned movement had launched the initial appeal for the establishment of a new world information and communication order, immediately denounced at the time as a possible threat to freedom of information. Yet the current state of affairs in the

(Mr. Zeghib, Algeria)

developing countries indicated that freedom of the press and information were threatened above all by an ultimate censorship consisting of lack of funds, qualified personnel or access to the latest techniques. In the developed countries, in the name of freedom of the press, veritable communication monopolies were shaping and distributing media information. More than 85 per cent of the information disseminated did not at any stage of its development or dissemination involve the 80 per cent of the world population to which it was directed. Hence the renewed call now for a new international information and communication order. Such an order would not only do away with disparities but create and build the capabilities of the developing countries and allow their message to be transmitted and heard, thus bolstering better understanding among peoples.

54. The determination and professionalism of the Director and staff of DPI in carrying out their mandate were commendable. His delegation noted, however, that in the report of the Secretary-General (A/46/449) no reference had been made to the new world information and communication order, although that was one of the most important aspects of the DPI mandate. At its next session, the Committee on Information should clarify the Department's mandate in more specific terms and should identify central points that should be given priority consideration in each of the areas dealt with by DPI, according to a specific timetable established by the Committee on Information.

55. No obstacles should remain to the free circulation of information. Those fighting for the establishment of a pluralistic press in every nation should give equal attention to the establishment of pluralistic sources of information among all nations. Only thus could cooperation among peoples be achieved.

56. Mr. HACHANI (Tunisia) said that Tunisia's information policy was based on freedom and diversity within the context of the universally recognized professional code of ethics. It was still true, however, that in the developing countries, only modest progress had been made in introducing a more balanced flow of information worldwide, and the valid principle of freedom of information did not, unfortunately, always obtain. A new information order within the context of the new world order should therefore be pursued, as should the work reported in documents A/46/449 and A/46/21. His delegation attached great importance to human rights and fundamental freedoms, and in that context it was appreciative of DPI's efforts to publicize the attacks on the rights of the Palestinians. Other issues which would affect future generations, notably development, disarmament and the environment, also merited attention.

57. His delegation welcomed the outcome of the Windhoek seminar, and believed that journalistic training and access to information technology remained a priority in the establishment of a balanced and impartial flow of information which conveyed the values and principles of the United Nations Charter. The United Nations information centres should be assured of receiving the human

(Mr. Hachani, Tunisia)

and material resources required to fulfil their function in the optimum manner. To that end, the publications which they circulated should always be in the languages of the countries for which they were intended. Similarly, the press releases containing the resolutions, decisions and voting results adopted by the General Assembly, which were indispensable to those concerned, should be published in all the official languages, including Arabic.

58. Mr. MAHMOUD (Lebanon) said that information was the mirror and catalyst of events and developments at all levels worldwide, and provided scope for a wider international exchange of ideas and concepts. The free flow of information was also an important prerequisite for democracy. DPI was now expected to have a wider role and function, given that the new world order should enable the true problems which impeded development to be addressed more effectively. In that context, information was the proper channel through which to promote understanding and cooperation, and modernization and promotion of the mass media in the developing countries, through bilateral relations with the developed countries, was the surest way to bring about quantitative and qualitative improvements in the field of information itself. The envisaged world information order demanded a more equal flow of information in terms of both access and dissemination, in addition to a more objective coverage of regional and international issues.

59. His delegation acknowledged the complex task facing DPI, and also commended the role of the United Nations information centres. It supported the publication in Spanish and Arabic of the annual press release containing the resolutions and decisions adopted by the General Assembly, since that would facilitate the work of various ministries and social and research centres abroad. Beirut continued to retain its position as the leading publishing capital in the Arab world, despite the domestic difficulties thorughout which the work of the United Nations information centre had continued uninterrupted. His delegation looked forward to the nomination of a new director for the centre, and assured the Committee of the full cooperation of the Lebanese Government in enhancing the centre's future role both nationally and regionally.

60. Mr. FASEHUN (Nigeria) emphasized the central role of UNESCO in helping the developing countries improve their communications infrastructures. His delegation also regarded the consensus on information reached in 1990 as a welcome moral undertaking on the part of the developed countries to provide such assistance, which it suggested should be channelled unconditionally through bilateral and multilateral agencies. Nevertheless, the assistance already channelled through UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication had fallen far short of requirements. His delegation therefore called upon donors to increase substantially their donations in order to ensure increased freedom of information in the countries concerned.

(Mr. Fasehun, Nigeria)

61. With regard to the United Nations information centres, his delegation both welcomed and endorsed the recommendations of the Committee on Information. With that in mind, it called for centres in the developing countries, notably Dar-es-Salaam and Bujumbura, to be provided with directors in order to enable them to function properly, and expressed its belief that funding for the centres should be the responsibility of the United Nations. Nigeria's focus of concern over the information centres was attributable to the current difficulties being experienced by many developing countries, particularly in Africa, in securing access to information for use in schools and colleges. Moreover, the centres were often the only source of information on international politics and the United Nations itself, and likewise served as good research libraries.

62. His delegation welcomed DPI's multi-media approach in its efforts to publicize issues of high priority to the United Nations, and urged it to continue its activities against apartheid and to disseminate information on development in Africa as well as on human rights, disarmament and environment and development. DPI should be assured of receiving sufficient funding to enable it to fulfil its mandate, in which context his delegation welcomed the plan for inter-sessional consultations between DPI and the Committee on Information. Finally, it wished to suggest informal meetings between the Bureau of the Committee on Information, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Committee for Programme and Coordination in order to ensure that they were aware of the demands faced by DPI. Member States should be prepared to meet the additional costs incurred as a result of the increased membership and success of the United Nations.

63. Mr. CHAFIK (Morocco) said that while international relations could be improved by the development of information and communication media, the unequal access to the relevant technology and knowledge was such as to engender conflict. In fact, the monopoly of the developed countries in that field threatened to endanger the very survivial of the developing countries. A new world order of information and communication, corresponding to the new world economic order, should therefore allow a democratization of international relations, restore a balance in the circulation of information and boost the exchange of information between the developed and developing countries. The disparate flow of information from and to those two categories of countries would only diminish with cooperation. International law on the issue had its failings, and in some instances there were no applicable regulations. Technically speaking, the gap between the developed and developing countries was ever-widening, particularly with the emergence of state-of-the-art methods of communication. The developing countries had opted for dialogue as their best option for redressing the situation and establishing an exchange of information and ideas in the hope of strengthening and increasing cooperation. His delegation accordingly welcomed and commended the efforts of UNESCO, DPI and the Committee on Information, and encouraged any bilateral or multilateral initiatives aimed at helping the developing countries escape from their position of dependency.

(Mr. Chafik, Morocco)

64. Regarding the activities of DPI, whose achievements were admirable considering the financial constraints it faced, his delegation felt there should be more dissemination of information relevant to the developing countries. Since the United Nations information centres were most suited to that purpose, the network should be expanded and the infrastructure improved in order to ensure optimum conditions for fulfilling their function of creating an awareness of the Organization and its work. In conclusion, his delegation expressed encouragement for DPI's efforts to strengthen its cooperation with the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries.

65. Mrs. CASTRO de BARISH (Costa Rica) said that, in the Committee on Information, her delegation had joined the consensus on the draft resolution now circulated in document A/SPC/46/L.6, despite its reservations on paragraph 1 (m). Costa Rica would have wanted the second sentence of subparagraph (m), now reading "The Committee takes note of the requests of Costa Rica and Bulgaria to have information components in their countries;", to read "The Committee also recommends consideration of the requests of Costa Rica and Bulgaria to have information centres in their countries;".

66. For the information of the Special Political Committee, her delegation had had a draft resolution originally circulated informally by Costa Rica in the Committee on Information circulated to members as draft resolution A/SPC/46/L.8. In it, Costa Rica proposed the establishment of a United Nations information centre in Costa Rica, taking advantage of the facilities and premises of the University for Peace. Any financial implications of that proposal would be minimal, because the plenary Assembly had just adopted by consensus a draft resolution establishing a Trust Fund for Peace based on voluntary contributions to support the University's various activities.

67. Costa Rica did not intend to oppose consensus in the Special Political Committee, but would like its draft resolution and the relevant press releases to be reflected in the Committee's report to the plenary Assembly. Her delegation would also not insist that action be taken on draft resolution A/SPC/46/L.8, in the hope that the Committee would accede to the modest request that it should itself recommend the establishment of an information centre as proposed by Costa Rica.

68. The CHAIRMAN noted that Costa Rica was not requesting action on draft resolution A/SPC/46/L.8.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.